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ABSTRACT

At a conference that focused on critical issues for small schools, the initial speaker voiced the opinion that if current trends continue, public schools may ultimately serve only the handicapped. He cited a need for schools to implement changes through community outreach, day care, senior citizens programs, retraining opportunities, work with private sectors, part-time teachers, volunteers, and alternative facilities. Addressing the issue of leadership, the next speaker suggested reading materials, analyzed teacher supply and demand, and identified the qualities of a good leader. Several sessions on cooperative activities for small school districts addressed problems of small enrollments in specialized classes and limited services and facilities. Other sessions dealt with communication technology and reported on public, cable, and instructional television and computer links. Administrative and public relations issues were addressed at sessions which discussed strike management, principal selection, cutbacks in federal programs, and publicizing of outside contributions and support and educational successes. Sessions on curriculum suggested ways to facilitate change, provided a plan for initiating computer education, and reported on development of a small high school library and use of programed instruction. Other sessions compared achievements of United States schools with those of foreign countries and provided guidance in motivating students. (MM)

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Public Schools: At Center or Sidelined?

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1984 AASA SMALL SCHOOL

DISTRICT ADMINISTRATORS'

CONFERENCE REPORT

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1984 AASA SMALL SCHOOL DISTRICT ADMINISTRATORS' CONFERENCE REPORT

July 13-15, 1984 Rockport, Maine

Public Schools: At Center or Sidelined?

If current trends continue, public schools may wind up with just serving the handicapped, Michael Annison, president of the Westrend Group, said in an eye-opening speech to kick off the fourth annual Small District Administrators' Conference sponsored by the American Assn. of School Administrators.

At a conference that focused on critical issues for small schools, Annison noted that 55,000 schools throughout the country operate some kind of alternative program, 72 percent of the population does not have children in the schools and the traditional role of serving children only from 9 a.m. until 3 p.m. "must give way if public schools are to survive."

In a relaxed setting at the Samoset Resort in Rockport, Maine, Annison had anything but relaxing things to say to the small school leaders. The nation's economic and political systems are being totally restructured, he said, and the new Information Age, which is replacing the Industrial Age, ought to put schools and information at the center, Yet, he said, "we have a school system that is tied to an agricultural calendar." In this day and age, he said, losers fall back on the excuse, "They don't understand us." But in education and health care. the public is saying, "If you don't change, we'll get rid of you."

Because of the changing economy where new businesses are replacing old ones, "children coming out of school today will have six jobs during their lifetimes, on the average," Annison said. Students will need to learn how to learn and to adapt to changing jobs because

"50 percent of all available jobs will be changed within five years.

Annison pointed up another deficiency of the nation's schools—the neglect to consider the impact of the world economy and the need to know about other people and to understand the global economy. Because of the decentralization mode in society, "federal aid to education is over," Annison predicted.

Another big change is the shift from having to make a choice to having options to consider. For public education, this means that there must be community outreach, day care, programs for senior citizens, retraining opportunities, work with private sectors, part-time teachers, volunteers and alternative facilities. Schools must have "a new vision," Annison said, which will reach from very young children to senior citizens. Kindergarten children today, he reminded his audience, will spend all of their adult lives in the 21st century. "What can you do to build this new vision?" he asked.

Leadership Skills

With the message from Annison that new leadership is needed, the next general session speaker, Jim Huge, educational consultant from Denver, CO, sounded a positive note. "This is the best time to be a school administrator," he said. "We have now an opportunity to do more for young people." His rules for turning distress into success include: don't sweat the small stuff; remember it's all small stuff; and "if you can't fight or flee—flow."

Learn what others are reading to keep up, Huge suggested, by checking lists of the most popular books. Currently, they include *Megatrends*, of which Annison was an author, and *The One-Minute Manager*, which focuses on establishing rapport with staff, rather than keeping a distance. Another popular book is *In Search of Excellence*, which points out that the most productive companies make employees feel as if they are part of a winn-

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Participants Share Skills

Cooperative activities are a way for small school districts to survive, participants at a session on this topic agreed. Lee Smithey of Sheldon, IL, reported on cooperative purchasing by 14 schools in his county which together buy paper products, athletic goods and food services, realizing substantial savings in all of these areas. Despite the paperwork, the districts are looking toward expanding the purchasing to other areas, asking for bids on delivery of the goods to individual schools.

In Warsaw, NY, Paul Seversky said the problem was with small enrollments in specialized classes. The solution was an "electronic blackboard system," which will offer advanced math, foreign languages and other subjects, taught by a college professor who transmits to the Warsaw district and three others in the area. A phone line is all that the electronic blackboard system needs, he said. Students will be able to take college credit courses at high school, he added, for a cost of $13,000 per school, plus the phone line.

Van Sweet of Dos Palo, CA, reported on several types of cooperative arrangements in his state. These include joint power agreements between schools covering legal services, transportation, data processing, health insurance, workmen's compensation, property and casualty insurance and athletic and health supplies. Under county-wide joint power agreements, districts share library and audio visual services and bookkeeping. The state has encouraged a clearinghouse for small schools, Sweet added.

Other cooperative ideas discussed included sharing a business manager, transportation, inservice training, video programs, mobile computer classrooms, contracts on custodial supplies, curriculum guides, cable TV, training for new administrators and purchase of audio-visual equipment. Superintendents can even take turns attending meetings, they said.

At another session on cooperative activities, presenters Joseph Butcher of Medford Lakes, NJ, and E. Dale Birkland of White Bear Lake, MN, discussed transportation of handicapped students and programs for the handicapped that can help small school districts avoid paying the high cost of private schools. Another cooperative arrangement mentioned by Birkeland was with a community college to allow students to take advance placement courses.

Two-Way Technology

Bradley Madsen of Milan, MN reported that nine schools have formed a cluster around a public television station, with the TV station using the channels for entertainment from 7 p.m. until 7 a.m. and the schools using the channels the rest of the time. The schools plan to expand from their current K-12 use for the TV to adult and community education programming, Madsen reported, although there are some concerns over what is entertainment and what is education.

At Ticonderoga, VT, reported Joseph Verdone, the middle school and secondary school are linked by a Data General system for the schools' computers. The system permits all students to have individualized programming. The terminals are on line 24 hours a day, after school and in the summer, with adult usage widespread. Also, there is a regional library for software, to which ticonderoga contributes $1,500 a year and gets, in return, a wide variety of software and an opportunity for teachers to preview the software. Also, he said, the community access public TV has been moved to the high school where it displays activities and some school programs.

William Richards, reporting about technology in Walnut Grove, MN, said that the school uses 10 terminals, with a sequential plan of drill and practice in grades K-6, and algebra and journalism in the upper grades. The computers also are used for high school report cards, scheduling and mailing lists. The high tech goals for Walnut Grove, he said, include basic knowledge of technology, inservice training for the staff, enhancement of courses, including math, music theory, Spanish, chemistry, physics, triginometry, and civics; computer literacy, including careers, self-evaluation and programming; computer management and instructional systems including lesson plans and state reports; and community access, which will allow people to check out computers and software. Phone access to the computers is planned, he said.

In another session on instructional TV, Norman Yackle of Shannon, IL, said that alternative delivery systems are necessary for the survival of small schools. Two-way TV is one way that can help, and in Illinois a consortium was formed for planning and organization, using cable TV to deliver programs. Despite some initial opposition and problems, the plan is being phased in with superintendents from throughout the country requesting more information after an article was published last winter. In Carrol County, IL, reported Joel

McFadden of Lanark, IL, seven courses were taught by TV this past year, and plans are to not only expand the courses throughout the grades but also to extend the use of TV to adults. He added, however, that teachers have become concerned because citizens can tune in to classes if they have cable TV in their area.

Earle Mailand of Milledgeville, IL, reported that a group of schools rents cable for an initial $18,000 cost with an on-going cost of about $2,000 per school per year. A first step, he said, is to set up a governing board, and school boards must agree to cooperate with each other. Also, he said, use a consultant for technological advice. Having common calendars among the participating school districts is important.

Special Management Practices

Speaking on strike management in small school districts, H. Alan Brown of Poultney, VT, said that keeping the schools open is important because otherwise, the days would have to be made up, and when the schools were open, teachers were docked their pay. His strategies included advance planning that beefed up the substitute teacher list "inconspicuously;" providing good public relations that lets everyone know schools were open and functioning; arrangements with the sheriff for round-the-clock security; and collecting plan books the day the strike was called in order to have them available for substitutes. The substitutes, he said, were paid twice the daily rate, sought by announcements on the radio, and even school board members came in to teach.

Other management practices discussed at sharing sessions included the step-by-step process used by William Nennstiel for selecting principals in Springville, NY; and a merit pay planning agreement, reported by Foster Shibles of Turner, NE, that includes seven teachers, four administrators and two board members, instructed to have a plan by September 1985.

Thomas Moriarity of Vermillion, SD noted that because of the cutback in federal programs, school districts in his state had turned away from innovation. The state, he said, should help develop policies which would be responsive to local creative leadership and which would address efficiency, equity and quality.

Outstanding R & R Activities

The conference opened with an outdoor reception overlooking the Samoset's famous golf course with its exquisite view of Penobscot bay.

The Rockland High School Dance Band, under the direction of Marlene Hall, provided entertainment. Golf and jogging on the mile-long stone breakwater trail and par course highlighted early mornings and late afternoons. The swimming, boating, and hiking was superb as the weather cooperated with lots of sunshine and summery temperatures. The closing event brought participants and their families together on the cruiser Mount Katahdin, for a leisurely boatride and lobster dinner.

Public Relations

Small school districts especially need good public relations, Roland Smit of Phillip, SD, told a sharing session. The total staff must be involved in the effort and the program "must sell what the students are doing." He showed copies of a district newsletter that included contributions from district support groups, such as the PTA and the Boosters Club.

George Young of Eastville, VA, reported on a technique that compared his district with national studies, which emphasized success in education in the Northampton County public schools, he said. The schools were able to turn from a defensive to an offensive position through active public relations, he said.

Curriculum

Bert Hageman of Erie, IL, shared a guide for goal setting with the group attending a special session on curriculum. Donald DeLong of Murphys, CA, stressed that to undertake curriculum change, an environment of trust must be established and the staff needs to experience some victories along the way. In Murphys, a curriculum council of parents, teachers, and administrators led the change process. Stephen Gordon of Woodbridge, CT, shared his three-year management-by-objectives plan for initiating computer education. Gordon adds excitement to the process of educational improvement by making $500 awards to school employees who promote excellence.

In another session on improving the curriculum, Roy Owens of Virginia City, NV, reported on the development of a library for his small high school of 250 students. It uses computer telecommunications services and audio visual materials, obtaining some books and furniture from libraries that were closing, gifts and book suppliers.

In Buffalo, OK, kindergarten and first grade children were helped successfully to learn to read and write with the new IBM "Write to Read," program, said Virgil Wells.

At Center, Continued from page 3

ing team, and that every individual has a chance to shine as a superstar. The most effective leaders, Huge said the book points out, are good models who are good listeners and have good attitudes towards change.

Citing the major issue of teacher supply and demand, Huge noted that a severe shortage will exist by the end of the decade, but riffed teachers, in a study by Columbia University, said they would not return to the classroom because their new jobs rewarded and promoted them on the basis of productivity and their supervisors cared and supported improvement. Also, they were making more money. Three-fourths of the teachers said that recognition was more important than money (but money must come with it). Merit pay is not the answer, Huge said, but career ladders could be.

Making such a change will require good leadership, Huge said, quoting several sources on the nature of leadership. Good leaders, for example, help facilitate the group process; laugh frequently and purposefully; put together a personal support team; and consciously plan in order to raise the expectations of those they supervise.

Organizations, including schools, should be built around their strengths. "Losers don't know their own strengths," Huge said, "and don't want to talk about their weaknesses." He advised the small school leaders to set job targets on characteristics that rate the highest, to ask teachers to identify weak areas and adopt them as a "stretch goal," and provide a special program for those who fall below "acceptable," because "these people are different from the others."

Speaking of "Risk"

Everytime public schools come under criticism and attack, it is "coincidentally" at a time when Congress was being asked for more money for private schools, Charles Fowler, superintendent at Fairfield, CT, told another general session that focused on "The Excellence Report and Small School Districts."

Although the excellence report compared U.S. schools unfavorably with those in other countries, Fowler pointed out that except for Japan, more U.S. students graduate from high school than in any other country, so achievement comparisons are using different student populations. In Russia and West Germany, he said, only the top 15 per cent of the 17- and 18-year-olds are in high school.

As to other points in the excellence report:

- Before looking into adding days to the school year, "we should find more effective use of the time we currently have," Fowler said.
- As to comparisons with Japan, Fowler pointed out that the Japanese system is standardized and nationalized, and pressures on students create considerable social problems, such as a high rate of violence and suicide.
- The emphasis on college-level skills, he said, may be misleading students because the biggest growth in job opportunities will be in service areas and not those requiring college educations.

Fowler charged that many of the problems heaped on schools are due to "fabrications" in the mass media about standards and problems. "The manipulation of data," he said, "is one of the greatest threats we face," citing the comparison of achievement scores district to district and state to state as a media escalation of the "war of information."

Small school leaders should not embrace the findings of the reports, Fowler advised, but should keep the focus of decision-making "as close to the child as possible" and emphasize to the public the progress in skills and knowledge, rather than school days, hours or units.

Motivating Students

At a general session on motivating students, William Marston, principal from Goffstown, NH, and former president of the New Hampshire Principal's Association, stressed that teachers must "understand the audience . . . and what is really important to kids." Also, they must overcome the "podium" complex, developing new methods for teaching based on how and why children learn. Teachers can motivate students, Marston said, by understanding the importance of student success, providing praise and encouragement, having a sense of humor and trusting students.

Program for Partners And Kids

More than 50 partners enjoyed an outstanding program that included a special session with Mike Annison, a tour of Camden and Rockport, and a lecture titled "Making the Most of Your Memory", by Nancy Turner. Jim Huge made a presentation to the partners on leadership, and several informal group gatherings were held in a hospitality room reserved especially for the families of conference participants. A new feature, a pizza party and movie for children, met with lots of success.